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With No Democrat in the Race, Independent Candidates Challenge Jeff Miller

Kevin Derby

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Three challengers have emerged to take on Congressman Jeff Miller, a Republican who was first elected in 2001. Miller represents the Panhandle's 1st Congressional District, which reaches from the Alabama border to Washington County. The district includes Pensacola and Fort Walton Beach.

Miller has raised more than \$253,000 for the 2010 election cycle, including almost \$110,000 from P/OCs. He is considered one of the more conservative members of the Florida delegation, having received the highest ranking possible from the American Conservative Union in 2009. Winning 66 percent of the vote when he was first elected in 2001, Miller has exceeded that mark in each of his four bids for reelection.

Without a Democratic opponent, Miller is heavy favorite, although he faces two independents and an old foe now running as a write-in candidate.

John Krause, a small businessman and pastor, was originally going to challenge Miller in the Republican primary. He pulled out of the GOP contest to continue his campaign with no party affiliation.

"I am still a registered Republican," said Krause on Thursday. "I have the same platform."

Krause backs the FairTax and calls for a smaller federal government, including the elimination of the Department of Education and the Federal Reserve. "We need to have less government," he said, adding that this does not mean he supports cuts to the defense budget. "We can't reduce the size of our armed forces," he said.

Krause said that Miller has been solid on some issues, including opposing abortion and the Obama health care plan. But Miller still has not done enough for the district, he said.

While Krause said he is not opposed to free trade in general, he blasted Miller for backing

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some trade pacts.

"He voted for C.A.F.T.A.," grouched Krause, who maintains that CAFTA cost 10 million American jobs. "It's time free trade benefits the people of the U.S.," he said.

Krause also said that Miller voted against the district on a number of issues, including infrastructure. A strong supporter of term limits, Krause said it is time to remove career politicians from office and restore citizen legislators. He said he's proud to be endorsed by groups advocating against career officeholders, such as the Independence Caucus and Bring Home the Politicians.

"My campaign is all about the people," said Krause.

At the end of the first quarter of 2010, Krause had raised almost \$16,000 in contributions and had also loaned his campaign more than \$6,600.

Jim Bryan is gearing up for another chance at Miller. Bryan had been the Democratic nominee against Miller in 2008 and carried 29 percent of the vote against the incumbent.

"My big issue is the oil spill and how we've allowed this to happen," said Bryan.

Bryan says oil drilling presents a fundamental threat to military operations in the Panhandle as well as its economy. "We must protect Elgin Air Force Base at all costs," he said. "Our tourism industry cannot be jeopardized."

Bryan said he rejected the option of running as a Democrat to run an independent write-in campaign.

"I've done it to make a statement," he said. "Being an American is a higher responsibility than any party."

A decorated Vietnam veteran with a background in parachuting and weapons testing, Bryan said he has raised a little more than \$4,000 so far.

"People wanted a candidate to vote for -- a person who's not a party, and that's what I am giving them," said Bryan. "I'm the real Forrest Gump."

Joe Cantrell of Pace filled out the paperwork to run for the seat as well and will be on the November ballot with no party affiliation. Calls to the Cantrell campaign were not returned, and the campaign does not appear to have established a Web site.

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Jeff Miller Jim Bryan Joe Cantrell John Krause News Politics

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